

# Turning toward or away from God: COVID-19 and changes in religious devotion

How does the COVID-19 pandemic impact people's devotion to religion? Do individuals experience changes in their level of religiosity? If so, what differentiates people that became more religious, less religious, and stayed the same?

We asked 685 US participants with a religious affiliation about their level of religiosity, religious practices, their perception of the severity of COVID-19, prosocial emotions (e.g., positive feelings like gratitude and awe that we have towards others), and well-being.



## Our Findings

Of our participants, 34.5% reported an increase, and 12.9% reported a decrease in religious devotion.

Both those who reported an increase and a decrease in religious devotion happened were more likely to feel stressed and threatened by COVID-19, and search for meaning in life.

Those who became more religious reported more positive emotions like gratitude and awe and felt a stronger sense of meaning.

Increased religious devotion during the COVID-19 pandemic was found to be driven by personal worship, feeling the need for a higher power, and trying to cope with life's uncertainties.



Decreased religious devotion during the pandemic was attributed to a lack of engagement in communal worship, a decrease in commitment or priority, and challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic leading to doubts about their beliefs in God.

Some individuals maintained their level of religious devotion during the COVID-19 pandemic. These individuals typically gave simple responses about not seeing a reason for COVID-19 to change their religious devotion, or provided unclear or vague responses.

## Our study suggested overall that

People who reported increasing their religious devotion during the pandemic were more likely to find meaning and cope with uncertainty, while those who experienced reduced religious devotion struggled to find meaning and faced challenges to their belief in God.

The study in essence highlights the importance of religion in providing a sense of meaning and stability during times of crisis, as it can help individuals find peace, maintain hope, and regain a sense of control.